

Message Text

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ACTION INR-07

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 EUR-12 NEA-09 ISO-00 CIAE-00 NSAE-00

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R 050938Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3131

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 1268

NOFORN

EO 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PINR, XF

SUBJECT: INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY ESTIMATE ON MIDDLE EAST

REF: STATE 71859

1. SUMMARY. MODEST INCREASE IN SYRIAN MILITARY READINESS
APPEARS MORE CAUTIONARY THAN AGGRESSIVE AND MAY BE MOTIVATED

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AS MUCH BY INTERNAL BAATH PARTY POLITICS AS BY SUSPENSION

OF KISSINGER MISSION. IF GENEVA SHOWS NO PROGRESS BY MID-75, SARG WILL IN FIRST INSTANCE LOOK FOR WAYS TO USE ITS MILITARY POWER TO POLITICAL ADVANTAGE RATHER THAN TRY TO RECAPTURE GOLAN FROM IDF MILITARILY. EGYPTIAN EXTENSION OF UNEF HAS PUT SYRIA IN EXPOSED POSITION OF HAVING UNDOF EXPIRE FIRST. SARG WILL PROBABLY LOOK FOR POLITICALLY ACCEPTABLE WAY TO EXTEND MANDATE TO COINCIDE WITH OR GO BEYOND EGYPTIAN EXTENSION. SYRIANS ARE NOT ALL THAT CONFIDENT OF AUTOMATIC EGYPTIAN MILITARY SUPPORT IF NORTHERN FRONT HEATS UP. SOVIET RELUCTANCE TO TALK FRANKLY TO SYRIANS COULD INDUCE DANGEROUS SYRIAN OVER-Y TIME OF EXTENT OF SOVIET SUPPORT IN EVENT OF RENEWED HOSTILITIES. END SUMMARY.

2. FOLLOWING COMMENTS RELATE TO REFERENCES TO SYRIA IN REFTEL.

3. SYRIAN MILITARY READINESS AT INCREASED LEVEL. OUR LIMITED OBSERVATIONS SUPPORT ESTIMATE THAT MODEST INCREASE IN SYRIAN MILITARY READINESS HAS OCCURRED. IT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN OF A CAUTIONARY NATURE AS COULD BE EXPECTED AFTER SUSPENSION OF KISSINGER MISSION AND NOT A PRELIMINARY TO HOSTILITIES. RECENT USDAO REPORTS INDICATE SOME CALL-UP OF SKILLED MECHANICS AND DRIVERS, BUT U.S. TRAVELLERS ON PRINCIPAL SYRIAN ROADS OVER PAST WEEK (DERAA-DAMASCUS, KUNEITRA-DAMASCUS, DAMASCUS-ALEPPO-LATAKIA-DAMASCUS) NOTED NO UNUSUAL MILITARY ACTIVITY, PRECAUTIONS OR ROADBLOCKS WHICH WOULD BE ASSOCIATED WITH FULL MILITARY ALERT. ABOUT THE USUAL NUMBER OF SYRIAN SOLDIERS WERE NOTED HITCHHIKING RIDES ON ROADS AND STROLLING IN DOWNTOWN DAMASCUS.

4. LOW-LEVEL MILITARY ALERT MAY HAVE ADDITIONAL MOTIVATION THAN ARAB-ISRAELI SITUATION. INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE HAS FOCUSED IN RECENT DAYS ON ELECTIONS TO BAATH REGIONAL COMMAND CONGRESS, WHICH CONVENES APRIL 5 TO ELECT NEW SYRIAN REGIONAL COMMAND. REGIME HAS TAKEN PRECAUTIONS AGAINST POSSIBLE IRAQI INTER-

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REFERENCE IN THESE ELECTIONS AND HAS HAD NUMBER OF SYMPATHIZERS WITH CIVILIAN (IRAQI) WING OF PARTY PLACED IN TEMPORARY DETENTION. SEVERAL MILITARY OFFICERS OF SIMILAR PERSUASION HAVE REPORTEDLY ALSO BEEN TEMPORARILY NEUTRALIZED. AT CONGRESS ITSELF, SYRIAN POLICY TOWARD MIDDLE EAST ISSUES WILL BE SUBJECT OF DEBATE. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT ANY SIGNIFICANT SYRIAN MILITARY ACTION ON GOLAN WILL TAKE PLACE WHILE

CONGRESS IS IN SESSION.

5. IF THERE IS NO NEGOTIATING PROGRESS BY EARLY SUMMER, THE ODDS ARE HIGH THAT SYRIA AND EGYPT WILL OPEN HOSTILITIES ON BOTH FRONTS. WE ASSUME THAT EGYPTIAN EXTENSION OF UNEF MANDATE WILL PUSHBACK TIMING OF THIS ESTIMATE. IN EVENT THAT GENEVA HAS PRODUCED NO POSSIBILITY OF PROGRESS BY SUMMER '75, WE BELIEVE THAT IN THE FIRST INSTANCE SYRIA WILL LOOK FOR WAYS TO USE ITS MILITARY CAPABILITY TO FORCE FURTHER POLITICAL ACTIONS FAVORABLE TO IT, RATHER THAN MAKE FUTILE ATTEMPT TO REMOVE IDF FROM GOLAN MILITARILY. SUCH SYRIAN CAPABILITIES COULD INCLUDE PROVOKING NEW FEDAYEEN ACTION OR STIMULATING ISRAELI FIRST STRIKE IN SOME FASHION. SYRIANS, BASED ON OCTOBER WAR EXPERIENCE, MAY HAVE GREATER CONFIDENCE IN THEIR ABILITY TO DEFEND THAN TO ATTACK IN SHORT WAR. IN THIS SCENARIO, SYRIANS WOULD ASSUME THAT UN AND GREAT POWERS WOULD IMMEDIATELY CALL FOR CEASE-FIRE LEAVING ISRAEL TO BEAR ONUS FOR INITIATING HOSTILITIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES WHICH SUCH AN ACTION WOULD AROUSE.

6. ACCORDING TO APRIL 3 PRESS, SOMALIA HAS ISSUED INVITATIONS FOR NEXT ARAB SUMMIT TO CONVENE IN MOGADISCIO ON JUNE 25. THIS WILL PROVIDE ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR REASSESSMENT OF COORDINATED ARAB POLITICAL MEASURES AND THUS REDUCE LIKLIHOOD OF ARAB-INITIATED MILITARY ACTION BEFORE THAT TIME.

7. WHILE NOT A CONTROLLING FACTOR, BELIEVE SYRIAN MILITARY LEADERS WOULD BE LESS LIKELY TO CHOOSE SPRING OR SUMMER TO INITIATE HOSTILITIES, WHEN SKIES OVER GOLAN ARE CLEAR AND GROUND IS DRY, THAN FALL OR
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WINTER WHEN SKIES LIKELY TO BE CLOUDY AND GROUND MUDDY AND SLOW.

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8. SYRIA WILL RENEW MANDATE ON GOLAN ONLY FOR LIMITED PERIOD AND ONLY IF PROVISIONS MADE FOR PLO TO ATTEND GENEVA CONFERENCE. THIS IS FIRST SUGGESTION WE HAVE HEARD THAT SYRIAN RENEWAL MIGHT BE TIED SPECIFICALLY TO WHETHER OR NOT PROVISION HAS BEEN MADE FOR PLO TO ATTEND THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. WEHN QUESTIONED ON UNDOF MANDATE RENEWAL BY VISITING JOURNALISTS AND OTHERS, ASAD AND KHADDAM HAVE NORMALLY SPOKEN IN VAGUER TERMS,
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SAYING THAT PROGRESS TOWARD PEACE WOULD BE NECESSARY. FURTHERMORE, EGYPTIAN EXTENSION OF UNEF MANDATE HAS PLACED SYRIA IN EXPOSED POSITION OF HAVING UNDOF MANDATE EXPIRE FIRST. IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT SYRIA WILL WANT TO FIND WAY TO EXTEND ITS MANDATE EITHER TO COINCIDE WITH UNEF EXPIRATION OR TO GO BEYOND IT, SO THAT LATER SYRIAN DECISIONS CAN BE MADE IN COORDINATION

WITH OR IN LIGHT OF EGYPTIAN ACTIONS.

9. SYRIANS CAN NOW COUNT ON EGYPTIAN MILITARY SUPPORT.

WE BELIEVE SYRIANS ARE NOT ALL THAT CONFIDENT OF AUTOMATIC AND IMMEDIATE EGYPTIAN SUPPORT IN EVENT OF RENEWED FIGHTING ON NORTHERN FRONT. IN FIRST PLACE, SUCH HOSTILITIES NEED NOT BE AN OPEN ISRAELI ATTACK ON SYRIA; THEY COULD BE CREEPING HOSTILITIES GROWING OUT OF ISRAELI REACTIONS TO FEDAYEEN ACTIVITIES IN LEBANON OR ELSEWHERE. PERIOD OF KISSINGER MISSION ALSO HAS NOT INCREASED SYRIAN CONFIDENCE IN SADAT, EVEN THOUGH SADAT'S ARAB CREDENTIALS HAVE NOW BEEN SUPERFICIALLY RESTORED. BELIEVE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP REGARDS IT AS VERY NEAR THING THAT PARTIAL SETTLEMENT WAS NOT CONCLUDED AND THAT THEIR MAXIMUM EFFORT TO MOBILIZE ARAB PRESSURE ON EGYPT PLAYED IMPORTANT PART IN PREVENTING IT.

10. SYRIA MIGHT URGE SAUDI ARABIA TO IMPOSE AN OIL EMBARGO OR PRODUCTION CUT BEFORE HOSTILITIES. AT PRESENT SYRIANS ARE NOT SURE ENOUGH OF ATTITUDE OF NEW SAUDI LEADERS TO RISK ANY DIRECT BILATERAL DEMARCHE OF THIS NATURE. IT IS MORE LIKELY THAT THEIR ACTION WOULD BE IN THE FORM OF PROMOTING UNIFIED ARAB ACTION WITH WHICH SAUDI ARABIA WOULD BE OBLIGED TO CONFORM.

11. SOVIETS WOULD NOT MAKE A STRONG EFFORT TO DETER THE ARABS. THIS ESTIMATE, WITH WHICH WE AGREE, CONTAINS DANGER THAT SYRIANS MAY MISREAD SOVIET INTENTIONS AND OVER-ESTIMATE SOVIET SUPPORT IN EVENT OF RENEWED HOSTILITIES. EXTENT TO WHICH SOVIET UNION TALKS FRANKLY WITH SYRIA, INCLUDING MAKING CLEAR THAT IN THE EVENT OF AN ARAB-INITIATED WAR ITS SUPPORT WOULD BE
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LIMITED, COULD BE A SIGNIFICANT INDICATOR OF HOW SERIOUS SOVIETS ARE ABOUT PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT AND ABOUT MAKING GENEVA WORK.
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